

TRANSCRIPT

U.S. Embassy to Azerbaijan

Ambassador Richard Morningstar

Remarks

Information Communication Technologies Forum

Baku Business Center, Baku, Azerbaijan

December 3, 2013

Ambassador Morningstar: Thank you very much. Minister Abbasov, it's always a pleasure to share a speaking platform with you and to hear your perspective for the development of Azerbaijan's economy.

I'm thrilled to be here with you today, particularly to support the presence of so many Americans that are here. Before beginning, I'd also like to say thank you to the U.S.-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce for organizing such a great delegation and important event.

As some of you may know, we actually sponsored other trade missions of Turkey-based U.S. companies to visit Azerbaijan just last week. That event was also determined a success. Business is being conducted and we hope it will lead to lasting partnerships.

For a long time—and Minister Abbasov made reference to this—when people talk about Azerbaijan's economy, they've spoken primarily about the energy sector. And while this sector remains important and will be for many years, it is good that we're talking now about other sectors of the Azerbaijani economy. We have always strongly supported Azerbaijan's economic diversification efforts so that future generations will be able to enjoy ever higher standards of living. And we agree with President Aliyev that this diversification is essential to the long-term stability of Azerbaijan. Minister Abbasov, you said the same thing during your presentation.

Sectors of the economy along [inaudible] the growth of the Azerbaijani government such as information and communications technology will help develop equal rules of the game for all players, and will enable more Azerbaijani citizens to reap the benefits of a growing economy. This will broaden the prosperity of the nation and make it a stronger and even more stable partner of the United States.

I should also mention that, as part of this effort, the steps being taken to improve the reforms, the education system are so important. That's going to be very very necessary to accomplish the kinds of things that Azerbaijan would like to accomplish.

This has been, today and the events of this week, is evidence of the effort of increasing level of cooperation and collaboration and communications technology between the United States and Azerbaijan, both in the private and in the public sector. Again, the Minister made a reference to our memorandum of cooperation in this particular area. I know that many U.S. companies already work in the Azerbaijan market today with global partners, and I believe that, as the ICT field continues to expand and innovate, the opportunities for U.S.-Azerbaijani companies will expand with it, and also really importantly on a regional basis.

This is a small country of nine million people, but it is a very strong and resourceful country. It can be a major player in this whole region. I think that's where there's a tremendous opportunity both for Azerbaijan and the United States and American companies. Both sides can complement each other's respective strengths and find business success in Azerbaijan and in the region.

We at the embassy see it as a major part of our job. We look forward to helping facilitate more cooperation in the ICT field and improving the business environment in Azerbaijan with stronger intellectual property right protections, tax and customs reform, and WTO accession.

Let me pause for a moment and talk about the importance of accession to the World Trade Organization. As some of you may know, the United States is currently engaged in negotiations over the expansion of the information technology, on which there is a treaty enforced by the WTO. Currently there are

70 nations representing 97 percent of world trade in the world trade in information technology. And a study that's been completed by the Information Technology and Innovation Fund found that expanding the Information Technology Agreement, covering the latest information and communication technologies, would increase U.S. exports of information and communications technology products by USD 2.8 billion and support 60,000 new U.S. jobs and boost global GDP by USD 190 billion annually. So it's not just the United States that benefits by this, but we believe it will benefit countries such as Azerbaijan.

Why is this relevant to Azerbaijan? Because when you join the WTO and participate in the agreements that reduce trade barriers on ICT products, it is Azerbaijan's industry that stands to benefit.

Apart from WTO accession itself, making the kinds of reforms (such as meaningful intellectual property rights legislation) would create the conditions for technology start-ups here and in Azerbaijan at large. We believe doing this will make it easier for more business and civic connections to occur that will improve the lives of citizens—both Azerbaijani and American—and complement both Azerbaijan and America.

I've always said that Azerbaijan can play a major role in the region and on the world stage as it carries through on some of these things.

So, developing the energy sector here in Azerbaijan is just the first step of the journey. Deepening our cooperation, investment in the ICT field and other fields as well will maximize the number of Azerbaijanis who benefit from the country's immense potential.

So, to that end, again, I salute the U.S.-Azerbaijani Chamber of Commerce and everyone else here in this regard. Thank you again.

I look forward to working with many of you to help develop cooperation between the United States and Azerbaijan. Thank you very much.

####